

# **ELEPHANT ROCKS STATE PARK**

## ***CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN***

**February 2025**

**Location:** Iron County  
**Established:** 1967  
**Size:** 133.75 Acres

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of Elephant Rocks State Park is to preserve and interpret the outstanding local geology, particularly the features of the ancient granite rocks (elephants) found within its boundaries and the local quarrying industry. A second mission component is to provide quality recreational experiences consistent with the management efforts to protect the park's natural resources.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Located in Iron County, Elephant Rocks State Park features massive, rounded granite boulders atop a granite barren in the St. Francois Mountains. These unique and ancient Precambrian boulders are approximated to be 1.3 billion years old. The park was once recognized by the former president of the National Parks Association, who considered Elephant Rocks worthy of protection "on the order of Gettysburg national shrine."

Elephant Rocks provides over 106,869 annual visitors the opportunity to enjoy picnicking, hiking and bouldering. The park offers a unique look into the former local rock quarry remnants, as well as the natural features that have been recognized by visitors throughout history. The "Graniteville Granite" or "Missouri Red" granite was quarried for use as building, paving, and monumental stone, and was shipped all over the United States. Some notable Missouri uses can be found in the pillars of the Eads Bridge, the Anheuser-Busch Brewery, and the St. Louis Customs House and Washington University in the St. Louis area, as well as the pillars of the Governor's Mansion in Jefferson City.

With Elephant Rocks being a natural tourist attraction since before statehood, it was a natural to be suggested in 1924 as a state park. However, it was not until 1967 that Elephant Rocks became a member of the Missouri's state park system through the generosity of John Stafford Brown, retired chief geologist for St. Joseph Lead Co. The park officially opened three years later. A seven-acre area in Elephant Rocks State Park was designated as "Elephant Rocks Natural Area" on June 5, 1978.

The focus of Elephant Rocks' development centers on new additions to the park's Day-Use areas to accommodate the growing number of visitors. These proposed developments include improved restrooms, parking areas, and trail improvements so that visitors can come and

enjoy the exceptional majesty and incredible scale of these rare Missouri boulders and the surrounding trails.

## **SITE GOALS**

- Preserve the natural and cultural resources located within the park’s boundaries;
- Provide recreational opportunities and public use facilities compatible with the park’s mission, resources, and public needs;
- Provide adequate orientation and interpretive facilities to enhance visitor experience; and
- Provide administrative support facilities to ensure successful operation and maintenance of the park.

## **INTERPRETIVE THEMES**

- Geology and formation of the “elephants”
- History/significance of granite quarrying
- History of location as visitor destination and/or development of the park

## **SITE STRUCTURES**

<b><u>Structure</u></b>	<b><u>Sqft</u></b>	<b><u>Const. Year</u></b>	<b><u>Historic</u></b>
Restroom #1	171	2006	-
Storage Building	300	1980	-
Residence	1976	1970	-
Restroom #2	171	2014	-
Well House	162	1972	-
Service Building	1200	1970	-
Storage Shed	333	2001	-
Vault Toilet	88	1988	-
Beverage Shed	240	2017	-

## **USE AREAS & DEVELOPMENT**

Elephant Rocks State Park’s development philosophy should emphasize preservation and interpretation of the unique and ancient Precambrian boulders within Missouri’s St. Francois Mountains. Development objectives should support enhancing accessibility and improving guests’ experience within the park.

### **1. Highway 21 Improvements**

Collaborate with MoDOT to facilitate dedicated Highway 21 turning lanes into and out of the park (center & edge turning lanes). Also install “caution vehicle exiting” light due to limited range of sight for oncoming Highway 21 traffic. These features will greatly improve traffic safety for park visitors.

### **2. Improve Traffic Flow**

Due to years of continuous and unprecedented visitation, there is need to improve traffic flow in and out of the park. The core of this objective is the development of a U-turn opportunity for visitors to use if parking is unavailable, a separate exit lane out of the park, and implementation of passive parking management.

- U-turn opportunity before committing to parking loop
- Separate exit lane for easy egress
- Potential passive parking management
  - ATM/Ticket reservation system with RS2 and phone reservation option
    - Check-in / Check-out capability
  - Real-time parking availability display connected to ticket/reservation system.
- Active parking management/monitoring
  - Potential manned check station constructed prior to or concurrent with the development of the turn-around space.

### **3. Improve Parking**

To accommodate increased visitation, the existing parking layout will be redesigned to alleviate traffic congestion, increase parking capacity, accommodate oversized-vehicles, and provide dedicated parking for motorcycles.

### **4. Increase Restroom Capacity**

Restroom facilities will be upgraded throughout the park to meet growing visitor use. The existing vault toilets will be replaced with flush toilets.

- Move to a total of 8 hole flush toilets – stick built
  - 2 hole flush currently exists (currently heated/all-season)
  - New unisex 6 hole flush toilet
- Demo remaining pit toilet

### **5. Update Existing Day Use Area**

Improvements to the existing Day Use Area are needed to accommodate increased visitation. This will include the addition of more ADA picnic tables and improving existing sidewalks. If necessary, paved trails can be moved due to loss of trees.

### **6. Enhance Wireless Connectivity**

Due to limited cell coverage within the park, a cell booster/associated infrastructure is to be developed near the existing restrooms in the Day Use Area for public safety and operations.

### **7. Develop New Interpretive Area**

A new Interpretive Area is to be developed to accommodate small programming and interpretive tour staging southwest of the Braille Trail 3-way intersection (near existing vault toilet).

- Demolish existing vault toilet
  - Utilize existing footprint to construct a small non-reservable shelter
- Move existing interpretive panels to the new Interpretive Area and/or install new interchangeable panel kiosk
- Develop amphitheater utilizing topography, which forms a natural bowl
- Develop ADA paved trail loop into the Interpretive Area

- Visitors can bypass and continue onto the Braille Trail or explore interpretive features.
- Will improve visitor foot-traffic flow.

## **8. Construct Small Concession Stand**

Construct a small concession stand near the Braille Trail trailhead to offer food, drinks, and merchandise for park visitors.

## **9. Upgrade Braille Trail**

- Upgrade and expand, where necessary, the Braille Trail to meet federal ADA standards for the entirety of the trail.
  - Widen the trail to accommodate track chairs and side-by-side vehicles for inclusivity and safety.
- Replace culverts/drainage infrastructure with U-shaped drainage channel and grate for easy removal of runoff debris.

## **10. Expand Maintenance Shop**

Increased indoor maintenance space is needed in the existing service area to accommodate indoor vehicle and equipment maintenance.

- Add on to current structure qty. 2, 12' bay door structure
  - Utility infrastructure consideration
  - Potential EV charging station

## **11. Expand Waste Water Infrastructure**

Expand waste water infrastructure to accommodate 8 hole flush restrooms and service area in the existing Wastewater Area.

### **Special Considerations**

To accommodate park visitation, a second Day Use Area with appropriate amenities would be advantageous. However, the current extent of the park property does not support this development. In the future, if property is acquired from adjacent willing sellers or donors, it should encompass a new Day Use Area and include:

- Minimal overflow parking off of County Road 96
- Shelter
- Vault
- Access to the new Woodland Trail

## **PROJECT PHASING**

### **1. Phase 1**

- a. Improve Traffic Flow
- b. Improve Parking
- c. Increase Restroom Capacity
- d. Expand Waste Water Infrastructure

## **2. Phase 2**

- a. Highway 21 Improvements
- b. Update Existing Day Use Area
- c. Enhance Wireless Connectivity
- d. Develop New Interpretation Area

## **3. Phase 3**

- e. Construct Small Concession Stand
- f. Upgrade Braille Trail
- g. Expand Maintenance Shop

Cultural and natural resource clearances will be required before on-site modifications and development occur.

## **PLANNING AND RESEARCH GOALS**

- Update and/or completion of the park's General Management Plan

## **ACQUISITION UNITS**

If offered, acquisition of adjacent property may be pursued only through willing sellers or donors. To be considered, units should enhance the mission of Missouri State Parks through one of the following categories:

- Resource preservation and protection.
- Recreational access and opportunity.
- Management facilitation.

## **CONTEXTUAL PLANNING INFORMATION**

### **Public Input**

Public input is an integral part of the CDP process. The following includes input opportunities throughout the planning process:

- 1. Public Survey #1, Nov. 9, 2022 – Dec. 8, 2022**
  - a. n = 1,007
- 2. Public Meeting October 19th, 5 - 7**
  - a. Battle of Pilot Knob State Historic Site
  - b. Public attendance: 15
- 3. Public Survey #2, October 19<sup>th</sup> – November 19<sup>th</sup>**
  - a. n = 4,480

**Communication methodologies:** Press release, legislative letters, social media posts, mostateparks.com/CDP, email bulletin, and QR business cards/flyer.

### **CDP Team Members:**

- Laura Hendrickson –Division Director
- Melanie Smith –Deputy Director
- Greg Combs – Regional Director, Eastern Region
- Krista Kennon – Deputy Director, Eastern Region
- Maria Potter – Deputy Director, Eastern Region
- Bryan Bethel – Park Superintendent
- Shannon Campbell - Senior Maintenance Worker
- Tyler Keim - Park/Historic Site Supervisor
- Allison Vaughn – Natural Resource Ecologist
- Harlee Scherrer – Natural Resource Ecologist
- Dr. Mike Ohnorsorgen – Cultural Resource Management Program Director
- Kim Dillon – Cultural Resource Management Section Chief
- Terry Bruns – Planning and Development Program Director
- Don Stier – Design Section Manager
- Ryan Dunwoody – Grants, Recreation, and Interpretation Program Manager
- Daniel Engler – Planning Section Manager
- Rebecca Young – Outdoor Recreation Management Section Chief
- Logan Nuernberger – Trail Coordinator
- Zane Price – Real Estate Manager
- Alison Dubbert – Interpretive Resource Coordinator
- Tisha Holden – Division Information Officer

### **APPENDIX**


- CDP Map
- Public Survey #1 Results
- Public Survey #2 Results

# ELEPHANT ROCKS STATE PARK


## CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

February 2025


### APPROVED BY:

  
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**Laura Hendrickson**  
Director, Missouri State Parks

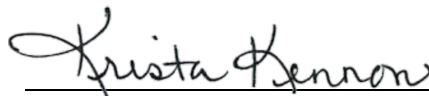
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**Date**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Terry Bruns**  
Program Director, Planning and Development


02/07/2025  
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**Date**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Greg Combs**  
Regional Director, Eastern Region

March 27, 2025  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Krista Kennon**  
Deputy Regional Director, Eastern Region

02/10/25  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Bryan Bethel**  
Superintendent, Elephant Rocks State Park

March 4 2025  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

# **ELEPHANT ROCKS STATE PARK**

## ***PREAMBLE & MISSION STATEMENT***

**February 2025**

### **HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE**

Unique, rounded granite boulders and a major quarrying operation make Elephant Rocks State Park geologically and historically important. The park features massive, rounded granite boulders atop a granite barren in the St. Francois Mountains. These unique, ancient, Precambrian boulders are approximately 1.3 billion years old. Although found elsewhere in the United States, they are not common or abundant. Thus, the Elephant Rocks have been given special designation as the 7-acre Elephant Rocks natural area. Clues to the formation and subsequent weathering of this granite are visible here, allowing geologists and visitors alike the opportunity to get a glimpse of the past.

From 1869 to approximately 1952, Elephant Rocks State Park and the surrounding area were the site of a major granite quarrying operation that shipped granite all over the United States. Commercially-valuable "Graniteville Granite," or "Missouri Red," was quarried for use as building, paving, and monumental stone. Some notable uses can be found in the pillars of the Eads Bridge, the Anheuser-Busch Brewery, and the St. Louis Customs House and Washington University in the St. Louis area, as well as the pillars of the Governor's Mansion in Jefferson City. Granite from this area was utilized beyond Missouri, as well, for example in the Thomas Allen Monument in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and in many paving stones and grave markers across the country.

The natural features of Elephant Rocks have been recognized by people throughout history. The trail traditionally used by Native Americans, extending from Potosi to Belleview, led through Elephant Rocks. The Shehan family that operated quarries on the property that would become the state park left the Elephants alone for over 50 years so that tourists could enjoy them. By the 1870s artists and photographers were producing postcards of the Elephants. Designers of the St. Louis Zoo, in preparation of the 1904 World's Fair, used the weathered boulders as inspiration for the settings to display hoofed animals. Prior to 1949, a former president of the National Parks Association considered the Elephant Rocks worthy of protection "on the order of Gettysburg national shrine."

With Elephant Rocks being a natural tourist attraction since before statehood, it was a natural to be suggested in 1924 as a state park. However, it was not until 1967 that Elephant Rocks became a member of the Missouri's state park system through the generosity of John Stafford Brown, retired chief geologist for St. Joseph Lead Co. The park officially opened three years later. A seven-acre area in Elephant Rocks State Park was designated as "Elephant Rocks Natural Area" on June 5, 1978.

The 133.75 acre park's most prominent natural resources, the large, rounded granite boulders within the 7-acre natural area, attract over 106,869 visitors per year. Hiking, picnicking, and



bouldering are some of the premier activities in the park. The park also is home to the nearly mile-long Braille Trail, the first paved trail in the state park system designed for use by visually impaired people to allow interpretation of some of the park's natural & historic features. Before hiking the trail, many visitors stop at an information kiosk that provides a glimpse into the quarrying history of Graniteville Granite. For those visitors willing to rough it a bit, other remnants of the past century's quarrying operations are still present, including the ruins of a railroad maintenance building, and three small quarry lakes round out the scenery, allowing for ample opportunity to observe wildlife.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of Elephant Rocks State Park is to preserve and interpret the outstanding local geology, particularly the features of the ancient granite rocks (elephants) found within its boundaries and the local quarrying industry. A second mission component is to provide quality recreational experiences consistent with the management efforts to protect the park's natural resources.

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## *PREAMBLE & MISSION STATEMENT*

February 2025

### APPROVED BY:



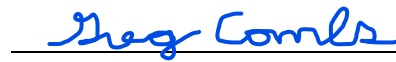
**Laura Hendrickson**  
Director, Missouri State Parks

4/4/25  
**Date**



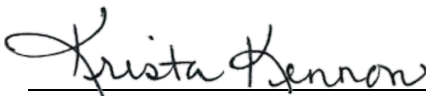
**Terry Bruns**  
Program Director, Planning and Development

02/07/2025  
**Date**




**Greg Combs**  
Regional Director, Eastern Region

March 27, 2025  
**Date**



**Krista Kennon**  
Deputy Regional Director, Eastern Region

02/10/25  
**Date**



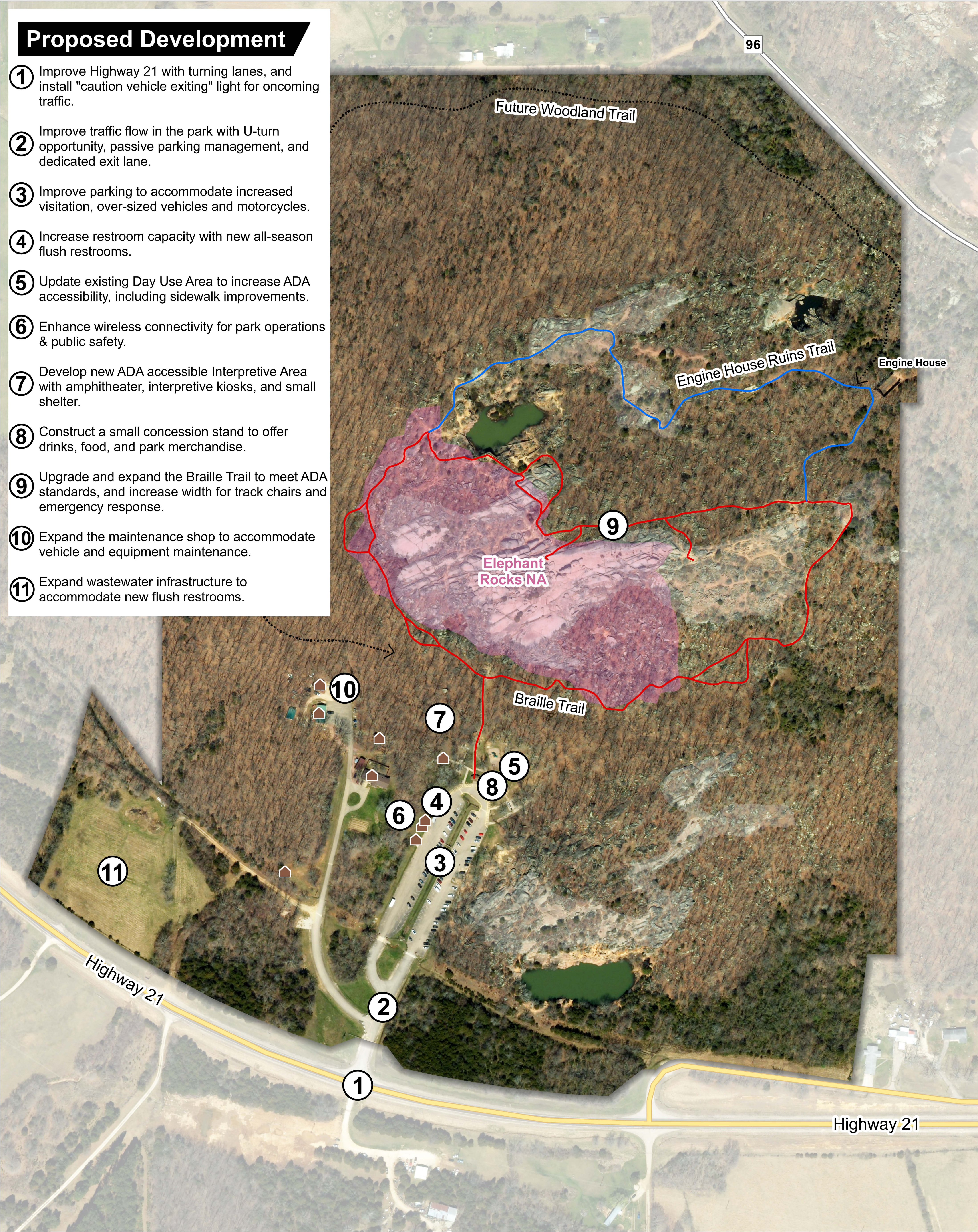
**Bryan Bethel**  
Park Superintendent

02/07/2025  
**Date**



Proposed Development

- 1 Improve Highway 21 with turning lanes, and install "caution vehicle exiting" light for oncoming traffic.
- 2 Improve traffic flow in the park with U-turn opportunity, passive parking management, and dedicated exit lane.
- 3 Improve parking to accommodate increased visitation, over-sized vehicles and motorcycles.
- 4 Increase restroom capacity with new all-season flush restrooms.
- 5 Update existing Day Use Area to increase ADA accessibility, including sidewalk improvements.
- 6 Enhance wireless connectivity for park operations & public safety.
- 7 Develop new ADA accessible Interpretive Area with amphitheater, interpretive kiosks, and small shelter.
- 8 Construct a small concession stand to offer drinks, food, and park merchandise.
- 9 Upgrade and expand the Braille Trail to meet ADA standards, and increase width for track chairs and emergency response.
- 10 Expand the maintenance shop to accommodate vehicle and equipment maintenance.
- 11 Expand wastewater infrastructure to accommodate new flush restrooms.



# ELEPHANT ROCKS STATE PARK

Projected Coordinate System:  
NAD 1983, UTM Zone 15N  
Absolute Scale: 1:1,505

NORTH

0

0.01

0.01

0.03

0.04

0.06

0.07

0.09

0.1

Miles

Legend

Structure

Braille Trail

Engine House Ruins

State

County Road

Glade

Natural Area



MISSOURI STATE PARKS

Conceptual Development Plan Date: Draft

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